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SUBJECT: CDA ADDRESSES ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE/APPEAL OF  
CONSCIENCE TOLERANCE CONFERENCE

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1. (U) Summary: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and Rabbi Arthur Schnier's Appeal of Conscience Foundation hosted a conference in Istanbul November 7-9, bringing together religious and other leaders from the Balkans, Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as Greece' Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, for an interfaith dialogue to promote peace and tolerance. The Secretary of Religious Affairs Chairman Ali Bardakoglu told the opening session that violence is not justified in the name of any religion, and called for a sincere dialogue between religions. He also delivered remarks, challenging the use of the phrase "Islamic terrorism," and saying greetings from the President in a joint declaration, participants condemned those who engage in terrorism and called upon all religious leaders to speak out forcefully against them. End summary.

2. (U) The November 7-9 conference brought together approximately 60 representatives of the Christian, Islamic and Jewish faiths from the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia to continue a discussion begun three decades ago among the major monotheistic religions about how to promote peace and tolerance in the region. Also in attendance were representatives of Prince Hassan of Jordan, the United Nations, and the European Union. Many had participated in a 1994 conference organized by the same sponsors, at the same Istanbul venue, at a time when conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Nagorno-Karabakh were raging, and presenters stressed that these channels of interfaith communication had since contributed to civil society development and reconciliation efforts.

Hosts Welcome Participants

3. (U) His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I welcomed the gathering with a holiday greeting to mark the end of Ramadan. Calling on religious leaders to not "vest...personal views in a garment of divine descent," he underscored the need for different religions to search for the common ground that exists in all their scriptures. He thanked the Turkish Republic for giving permission for the conference and for the participation of the Secretary of Religious Affairs Chairman Ali Bardakoglu.

4. (U) In his remarks, Rabbi Schneier recounted watching his synagogue burn as a child in Vienna during Kristallnacht, an event which led to his strong support for the UN Declaration against the intentional desecration of religious buildings. He added his wish that the conference look at issues relating to education, to ensure that textbooks not become "the fodder of warlords." He called on participants to continue to speak out forcefully against those who use religion to contribute to the incitement of violence. Rabbi Schneier praised the recent "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative launched by PM Erdogan and Spain's PM Zapatero at the 60th anniversary of the United Nations, and called for an "Inter-Religious Alliance of Civilizations" to be formed on that model.

Diyanet Chairman Bardakoglu

5. (U) Representing the Turkish government, Professor Bardakoglu offered a prayer for victims of recent natural disasters before addressing the man-made challenges facing the world, including war and conflict. These challenges require concrete action, he said, including the establishment of dialog between religions and cultures. He stressed that violence is not justified in the name of any religion, adding that terror had social, economic and political dimensions. He asked that the dialog be sincere, saying it was the duty of religious leaders to warn and enlighten political leaders to maintain this multi-cultural and multi-religious dialog.

Charge: Terrorism Has No Religion

16. (U) Following the three opening presentations, CDA addressed the gathering, stressing the single purpose of all those gathered for the event: to show solidarity and conviction that tolerance is the path to peace. In her remarks, she underlined that terrorism has no religion, no national cause, and no belief that can justify its violence. She challenged the use of the phrase "Islamic terrorism," as it creates a wrong and dangerous perception of an inherent connection between Islam and terror. CDA praised Turkey as a vibrant, secular democracy well suited for hosting such a gathering, though she also noted the need for further progress in expanding religious tolerance and resolving outstanding disputes. She also relayed greetings to the conference from President Bush, while commending Rabbi Schneier for his broad vision.

17. (U) After the opening greetings and salutations the evening of November 7, conference participants met in working groups for two days before producing a conference declaration on November 9. The conference was held amid heavy security, with police forces present in droves, and passed without incident. Media carried the event -- including Charge's message of solidarity and President Bush's greetings -- widely.

18. (U) Comment: This conference sent a clear message that religious leaders must condemn acts of violence carried out in the name of a religion -- any religion. To have such a regionally and denominationally diverse group agree on a three-page text is no easy feat, yet eleven years after producing the first "Bosphorus Declaration" at the Appeal's Peace and Tolerance I conference, Rabbi Schneier and the Ecumenical Patriarch were again able to bring together religious leaders committed to public expressions of interfaith dialogue and harmony. The conference was successful in reaffirming the role religious leaders can play in promoting peace and tolerance in the world today. End comment.

JONES